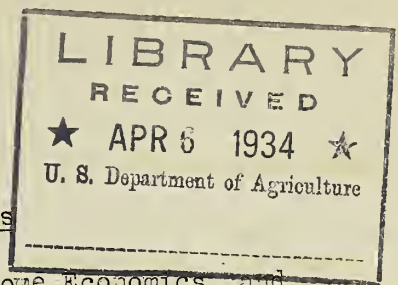


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HOUSEHOLD CALENDAR

Quality Labels on Cotton Dress Goods



A radio talk by Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, and delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC stations, Thursday, March 22, 1934.

MR. SALISEURY: Here's Miss Van Deman ready to give us another Household Calendar talk, What's your topic today -- vitamins, or more about selecting textiles, or what?

MISS VAN DEMAN: Well, I'm going to hold to my promise and talk about quality in cotton fabrics -- nice cool cottons for warm weather dresses. I know it sounds rash to even mention the possibility of balmy weather. It may bring on another snow storm. But maybe this is going to be one of the years when we'll hop straight from winter into summer. If it is, we'll certainly wish we had some cool wash dresses for those first hot days in May and June. And to my way of thinking, there's nothing quite so satisfactory for wear in hot weather as pretty color-fast cottons that you can put into the tub and wash.

Last time, you remember, we talked about some of the labels on silk fabrics that indicate quality. I suggested that you keep an eye open for the signs or tags on silks that tell whether it is a pure-dye fabric or one weighted with metallic salts. Some cotton goods also carry quality labels that indicate whether the colors are fast and whether the fabrics are treated to prevent shrinking. Clarice Scott of our textile division is making a collection of the informative labels on fabrics, and also on ready-made dresses. It's very interesting to see how some manufacturers want the public to have definite facts about the wearing quality of their fabrics. And it's equally interesting and also decidedly exasperating to see how some other manufacturers put on splashy tags with a lot of fine sounding phrases that don't mean a thing when you really study them.

Now on this question of color fastness in cotton fabrics. I wonder whether you've happened to notice an acorn-shaped tag or mark that says "Nafal tested fast colors"? N-a-f-a-l. That's the kind of label that means something, and the pity of it is that more cottons do not carry such labels. The National Association of Finishers of Cotton Fabrics stands back of this particular label. They finance real laboratory tests made in accordance with methods set up by a national association of textile chemists. This label assures the buyer that these fabrics are fast to both light and washing. Notice that point especially. When you see a mark that simply says "Guaranteed fast color" it has two weak spots. For one thing, this so-called guarantee makes no mention of any reliable laboratory tests. It's no guarantee in the strict legal sense of the word anyway. And for another thing, though the cotton fabric labeled this way may hold its color when it goes into the tub, it may fade in the sunshine. To be truly color-fast a cotton material should stand the light test and the water test. But in all these labels that Miss Scott has collected so far, I find only two that say definitely that the color will hold in both light and washing. Of course there may be more such labels, but she hasn't come across them so far. But there's no question that with all our modern knowledge of dye chemistry, the textile manufacturers can turn out no end of absolutely color-fast cottons labeled as such if we consumers let

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them know that's the kind we want.

And by the way, certain colors of cotton fabrics are no more likely to be color-fast than others. I have it straight from the textile chemists that there's nothing in the old notion that pink and blue, for instance, are much more reliable colors than green and lavender. They tell me that it's simply a question of the quality of dye. We now have good fast dyes for all the standard colors, and there's no reason why we can't get greens and lavenders and some of the pretty intermediate shades that are just as color-fast as the good old turkey-red and navy blue.

Many cotton fabrics also carry labels indicating that the manufacturer has done something to shrink them. That's all to the good, but if you don't want to be disappointed you need to know more about what these various terms mean. For instance, when you see cotton goods marked "preshrunk" you can be reasonably sure that it's gone through a shrinking process. But that's no definite assurance that the material won't still shrink some more. Miss Scott has found several labels that say "will not shrink" and they mean a lot more than just the word "preshrunk." Right now there's a movement on foot among the cotton-textile manufacturers to get even more definite labels on cotton yard goods. They are hoping to work out some plan whereby we consumers can tell when we buy the goods just how much we can expect it to shrink, whether one percent, or two percent or three. Miss O'Brien of our textile division has attended these meetings called by the American Standards Association and you can be sure she speaks right up for the consumer every time.

Sometime ago I spoke about quality guides in buying cotton sheets and pillowcases. If you want some printed information on that, write to me.

Time's up today. So goodbye until next time.